

[!\[\]\(a3ea015cc5581cad732d1eb81613fe7b_img.jpg\)](http://www.mondo-video.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Joel-1.jpg)**Cinematic Titanic Keeps MST3K Fans Afloat**

Interview with MST3K and Cinematic Titanic creator and star, Joel Hodgson

Conducted By: Mondo Justin

Mondo Film & Video Guide Editor

Getting the chance to speak with Joel Hodgson is very difficult. His management made me sign a contract asking me NOT to mention the break up of The Sha Na Na, "that time" in St. Paul with Rip Taylor, and lastly, DO NOT mention that bitch Cam-Bot to him.

So with those rules in place, I set forth to speak to one of the last true geniuses that television has seen in the last twenty-five years. Hodgson comes across as very warm and polite, and maybe it's the power of "Joel Suggestion" but somewhat Jim Henson like. If you've ever seen any interviews with Muppets creator, Jim Henson, you'll know what I'm talking about. For anyone truly out in Deep 13, Joel was the creator and star of the hugely successful and extremely significant television series from the late 80's/90's - Mystery Science Theater 3000.

Taking inspiration from Frank Zappa, and the Bruce Dern sci-fi shlock-fest Silent Running, Hodgson created a premise about a lovable hapless janitor of sorts that's blasted off into space by his boss (cause he isn't well liked) where with his robot friends are subjected to A Clockwork Orange Ludovico technique type torture, and forced to watch the worst of the worst B movies in film history and make fun of them. The premise today, sounds like something that could easily fit into a children's show, but back in 1988, there was NOTHING like it on television.

<p style="text-align: justify;">Mystery Science Theater 3000 was a huge success, even winning a Peabody Award for excellence. In 1993, Hodgson left the show due to creative differences, and became involved with the creme of contemporary comedians, working on television pilots, films, and critically acclaimed dramatic televisions series. He even went into business with his brother. In 1999, Mystery Science Theater 3000 went off the air. It's been twelve years, and fans are begging for more. Joel Hodgson is back, and he's gonna give it to them uncensored and unedited.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: Joel, I'm gonna try and ask you questions that you've never been asked before. So think of me as the Geraldo Rivera of cult T.V and film. So if I get on your nerves, please don't throw a chair at my nose.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Nice. Do you know what Geraldo'd real name is?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: No, what is it?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Jerry Rivers. Weird isn't it?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: Who are you comedy influences? And why?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Oh Boy...I grew up in the 1970's you know. People I really liked and who influenced me where people like Steve Martin, he was the Beatles of comedy. And I loved The Muppets, they where really big back then, and also Andy Kaufman. I was amazed by him, and loved the stuff he did.</p>

MONDO: What did you like so much about Andy Kaufman?

<p style="text-align: justify;">I loved the show Friday's. It blew me away. Where he announced he was a born again Christian. I really loved the stuff he did cause it was just so unbelievable. And I loved it when he painted with the media. Every time he did something it was just so baffling and amazing to me.</p>

MONDO: Who would win a fist fight between Andy Kaufman and Steve Martin?

Andy Kaufman. I have a feeling he's just a little more crazy than Steve.

MONDO: The Minneapolis comedy scene is the mid 80's must have been pretty amazing. It had all you MST3K guys, plus didn't it have those guys that did the *Let's Bowl* show like Rich Kronfeld?

Sure. Rich was around, and Tim Scott, who created *Let's Bowl*, and he worked on *MST3K*. Louie Anderson was around. It was great! The comedy boom went hand in hand with cable television taking off. We were lucky that we were all around then. Comedy clubs were everywhere in every town. I think there were eight clubs in Minneapolis alone. It was pretty unusual.

MONDO: Have you ever met any of your comedy heroes, and once you met them, did you discover they were just total jerks?

Not really. All my heroes had died. I was really close to meeting Andy Kaufman, but he passed away. Jim Henson had passed away. I love Frank Zappa, even though he's not a comedian. He was a creative inspiration for me. I did get to talk to him on phone before he passed away. I saw Steve Martin around L.A a few times, but I didn't talk to him. Zappa was amazing to talk to. He loved *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, so it was really cool to talk to him about the show.

[!\[\]\(a03a7eb2f4046e1d3c76772003e549ea_img.jpg\)](http://www.mondo-video.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/3000.jpg)**In doing research before our interview today, I've noticed that you've given about 1,456,002 interviews, and they're all available on line! Do you ever get tired of the same set of questions? What's one question you wish people would ask you?**

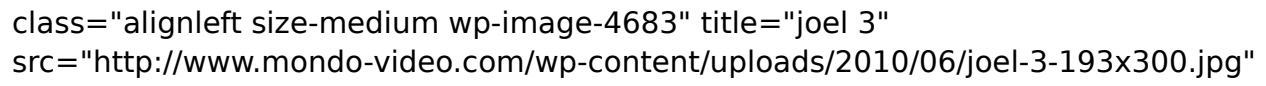
If you get the same questions you always know the answers. I don't get bored with interviews ever. Giving an interview sometimes can be like doing a act. Some people present your interview literally. And I don't like that. That happened to me in the early days. So, I'm happy to be asked the same questions over and over, cause then you have a better chance to tell your story perfectly.

MONDO: Going into *MST3K*, looking back do you regret leaving the show when you did? And if you had to do it again, would you leave?

Yes and no. There wasn't an alternative for me to stay. I felt I was losing control, I didn't think I was gonna be able to keep the product the way I wanted it. And that was important to me. And mostly, those feelings where about the movie. Granted, I regret it. If I knew what I knew now, I could've stopped and said "Wait, let's think about this!" But it would've been great if we could've worked out our differences.

MONDO: Were you happy how the end *MST3K* product looked after you left?

Yeah, I was. The tone of the show stayed the same. The most interesting thing about it, was that once I left, it proved that the concept of the show was the strongest thing. I never left, saying that the show would fall apart. I expected and wanted it to continue on. The show was un-breakable. Even seeing what *Riff-Trax* and *Titanic* is doing now, it proves that movie riffing is still going strong as a creative art form. And that's what it's all about. It showed that I was replaceable. In fact, eventually all of us got replaced, Trace, and Josh. It's the just way it is. It's part of the show's story. I got to do other things, and have experiences I wouldn't have had I stayed on the show. So at this point, I'm content the way things worked out.

<http://www.mondo-video.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/joel-3.jpg>  **MONDO: Once you left the show, did you stay in touch with everyone?**

Of course. There was a period of a couple years, where it was just too emotional, so I didn't really talk to them. But eventually we just kinda got back together.

MONDO: When you came back for your guest appearance for the show's final season was there any awkwardness or difficulty there? How did that appearance come about?

It was something the *Sci Fy Channel* wanted. Yeah, it was awkward. I came in with a idea to pitch. But they said they didn't wanna change anything. So I felt that the

show had changed. When I was there, we never got notes from the network or executives, so that's one thing I noticed was different, I think they lost some control over the show when it was at *Sci Fi*.

MONDO: Do you ever miss being on television on a weekly basis?

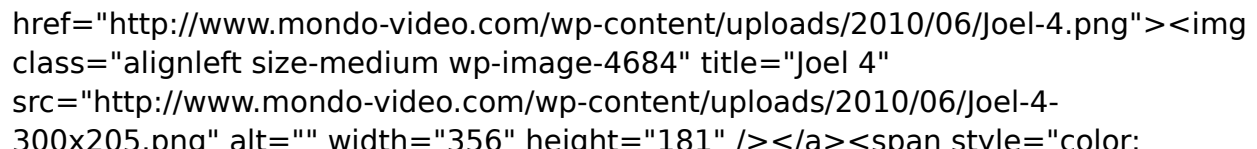
I liked making the show. It was a lot of fun. The actual experience of being on T.V was OK. To be famous because I was on T.V wasn't the reason I did it. I just loved the craft of making the show.

MONDO: In the documentary on the 20th anniversary *MST3K* DVD set, you mentioned that the Bruce Dern film *Silent Running* was a influence on you. Growing up were you a big horror and sci fi movie fan? And I was wondering if you had all time favorite horror or sci fi film, and why?

In the 70's there where some big sci-fi movies. *Planet Of The Ape*s was profound. *The Omega Man* was awesome. It seemed like everyone was getting ready for *Star Wars*. I was in high school when *Star Wars* came out. And that changed everything. I was somewhat casual about it, but compared to most, I felt I knew more about it than others.

MONDO: Do you have a personal favorite *MST3K* episode?

I like *Hercules Unchained* a lot. It was a great movie for us. Also, *I Accuse My Parents*. I asked a fan one time, "What's the funniest episode?" And they said " *I Accuse My Parents*." I really couldn't remember what we had did on that one, so I went back and watched it, and it's just so funny.

<http://www.mondo-video.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Joel-4.png>A small, square image with a white background. It appears to be a placeholder or a very low-resolution image. The text "Joel 4" is visible in the top right corner of the image area.**MONDO: Where did that "LA LA LA" section come from in the theme song? Did you guys write that part?**

That was Charlie Erickson who came up with that, he wrote the music to the theme. I was singing the lyrics to him one day. I told him I wanted the song to sound like a

Devo song, or something like a warm California song type. So I was in the studio singing it, and he just kinda threw it in. Even going back to theKTMA days, their doing it.

MONDO: Are there any "Invention Exchanges" you thought up, that never made it to air. Ideas that you really wanted to use?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">It's actually the opposite. There were a bunch I didn't really think we should've used. I got to empty my notebooks on those.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: Over the years, there's been a huge amount of bootlegging going on the internet with people selling entire seasons of shows including the KTMA shows on Ebay, I-offer and through websites like mst3kvideos.com. I was curious to see how you felt about that being the copyright holder of the show?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Jim Mallon holds the copyright actually. I have mixed feeling about what's available on the internet. It's kinda like the Grateful Dead model. Part of what made them famous, was that you could record their shows. So that idea is available for MST3K. So many people recorded the shows and gave them to their friends. It helped make our show what it became. The cool thing is, the show is still making money. DVD sales are up there. A lot of the shows have been made available. Each year that passes shows more DVD sales than the previous. So it doesn't seem to have hurt it. But at the same time, you just don't know. And you have to ask -- if people weren't pirating it wouldn't we be selling more DVD's or less?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: I can remember being like fourteen or fifteen years old when MST3K came on Comedy Channel and loving it. I was really interested in the show, and then the Higgins Boys and Grubber show. You had a hand in that as well right?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">I created that show with those guys. It was at the same time as MST3K. The Comedy Channel gave me a deal to create another show. So I introduced

those guys to Comedy Channel. We got money to make the pilot, we put in awesome clips of like Monty Python and stuff like that.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: Dave Allen appeared on that, and he also was cast in Judd Apatow's Freaks 'n Geeks as a re-occurring character as well as you yourself. Then you got involved with Dave Allen and Paul Feig in T.V Wheel, aren't you guys pretty much the 'Branch Dividians' of contemporary comedy now. Is everything paying off?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Dave Allen is still around. He was the Naked Trucker on Comedy Central, and he's been in a ton of movies. Steve Higgins is the producer for Saturday Night Live, and he's also Jimmy Fallon's version of Ed McMahon these days, so their all doing great.

MONDO: When you work on a show like Freaks 'n Geeks, or even on MST3K, do you ever go back and watch your performance?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Sure. I'm OK with it. You have to be in the right frame of mind with that. It's kinda like "work" to do it But it's not a problem.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: Is Dave Allen gonna be on tour with Titanic this time around?</p>

Yes, he travels with us all the time.

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: With T.V Wheel, are there any finished episodes in the can that never aired? Any chance that fans could see a DVD release in the future? Bootleggers are selling the first show on the net.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Yeah I know. There is actually only that one episode. X-box is the first pilot. I paid for it. Then we got the deal to do T.V WheeI. That's all there is actually.

MONDO: What's one thing that fan's don't know about Joel?</p>

I am into magic.

MONDO: Really? So how do you feel about that television show *Magic Secret's Revealed*?

The show with the masked magician? It's frustrating. It's all supposed to be a secret. And the guy that does that show is just exploiting it. But it kinda makes magic better. Cause magicians can figure out alternate methods to completing tricks.

[!\[\]\(6605b201d6f14d9b3bcb8ab5f274d107_img.jpg\) src="http://www.mondo-video.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Joel-12.jpg" alt="" width="217" height="408" data-bbox="112 345 880 375"/> MONDO: As a Minneapolis man, I need your answers on this? *The Replacements* or *Prince*?](http://www.mondo-video.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Joel-12.jpg)

I have to go with *The Replacements*!

MONDO: How about...*Husker Du* or *Soul Asylum*?

Tough one, I'll have to go with, *Husker Du*.

MONDO: Have you seen or heard about this new movie that people are buzzing about, *The Human Centipede*? What part would you want to be if you were forced to participate?

I've seen the trailer only. I would have to be the front.

MONDO: On the *Cinematic Titanic* website, you guys have a quote posted at the top of the page in a sideshow where the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* exclaims, "The *Led Zeppelin* of Movie Riffers!" How does that sit with you? Wouldn't you rather be the *Devo* of Movie Riffers, or the Wayne Newton or better yet -- what band

do you wanna be compared to when it comes to Movie Riffers?

MONDO: I'm good with *Led Zeppelin*. Cause their legends. They never toured very much. When I was in high school they came, but I couldn't go. So I'm gonna stay with *Led Zeppelin*.

MONDO: I really like the quotes from reviewer's on the *Titanic* website. I've been thinking about what I could say that hopefully would make your site. I came up with: *Like a prison inmate picking up the soap, "Cinematic Titanic hurts you...with laughter!"* What do you think?

Yes.. Do it.

MONDO: How much time, work or convincing did it take to get the gang back together to start *Cinematic Titanic*? And how long to get everyone out on the road?

It was simple. Everyone was interested and into it. So it was no problem.

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MONDO: Have you guys ever thought about trade-marking the term "Movie Riffing?"

I haven't done that. It seems better not to. It seems like it will have a stronger life without that in place.

MONDO: Can you take me through the process you guys use to choose the movies for *Cinematic Titanic*? I really enjoy how random they are. Especially, *East Meets Watts*? How did you come across that film? Al Adamson films seem to work well for you guys, no?

<p style="text-align: justify;">Some movies we have to license. And others are just public domain films. At times, we have people that help us research and clear stuff for us. I look at it, like someone who refurbishes homes. We look at it, like this is a movie we can afford, or it's in public, or can we even find a good print of it to show? Right now, we are looking at a bunch of movies for future projects, and we have to do copyright searches, then that clears that hurdle, can we find a good print, and that clears that hurdle, then we show to everyone and they sign off on it. Once we approve everything, then we take a look and see what we can do on it. So behind the scenes, it's really not emotional, it just comes down to picking a movie that we all think we can do a lot with.</p>

MONDO: Post Cinematic Titanic appearance and performances, are you and the gang still meeting and greeting fans?

<p style="text-align: justify;">After the show for sure. We usually will most of time, if there is time, meet the fans, and sign autographs. It's fun.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">MONDO: What's the strangest thing a fan has ever told you?</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;">Not too strange really. The weirdest thing is when a fan comes up to you, like if we've been to a town once in a previous year for a show, and they come up to you and expect that you'll remember them from that last year and last time you met them. It's a little troubling. You have to just say, "Thanks for coming, I'm glad you're here."</p>

MONDO: What is your proudest career moment and why?

<p style="text-align: justify;">Recently we did the Nokia Theatre on Times Square in New York City and we sold it out, like six weeks ago, and that was pretty cool. And when Time Magazine listed MST3K as one of the Top one hundred shows of all time. That was super surreal. I thought it was so cool and amazing. Those are

probably the things I'm most proud of.</p>

<p style="text-align: justify;"> Visit the official Cinematic Titanic website,
<a href="http://www.cinematictitanic.com/"
target="_blank">Here.</p>

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